

## **N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council**

### **MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 21, 2024 MEETING**

By Zoom Video Conference

#### Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat and Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Shirley: Heidi Ricci  
*NRWA*: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold  
*NPS*: Emma Lord  
*MW*: Pat Huckery

Guests: Sherry Anders, Shirley Greenway Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. The meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

#### Administrative

The minutes of the October 17, 2024 meeting were approved as amended. Lucy announced receipt of a letter of resignation from Joan Wotkowicz as Townsend's representative. She mentioned that she had one possible candidate to fill this seat. That said, an alternate for Townsend and several other towns should be filled so that all of the Wild & Scenic Rivers' towns have representation at our meetings. She urged representatives for towns lacking an alternate to reach out to their Select Boards.

Lucy also noted that, per our bylaws, we are to elect the Council's officers each year following the start of the new fiscal year. A slate of officers was presented and, on motion made and seconded, unanimously approved. Officers for FY25 are: Chair – Lucy Wallace; Vice-Chair – Heidi Ricci; Treasurer – Beth Suedmeyer; and Secretary – Rebecca Bucciaglia.

#### NPS

Emma Lord gave a brief report on the PWSR Gathering in northern Vermont. She noted that 15 of the 18 PWSR councils were represented and that many good ideas and program offerings were shared. The weather was unseasonably warm, which enabled participants to enjoy some time paddling on a nearby river. The next gathering will be in two years.

At Lucy's request, Emma explained the deadline for use of the current Cooperative Agreement's (CA) funds. Emma explained that in the past CAs lasted for five years, but that the terms have now been changed to four years, nine months. In addition, funds from our first CA need to be spent or obligated to be spent by April 30, 2025, the end of the current CA term. Any obligated funds must be spent within a few months – preferably by June 30, 2025.

To further complicate our current budgeting, the term of the second CA began on July 1, 2024 (FY25), providing us with another \$210,000. In addition to spending the remaining funds in the current CA, we should also be drawing on the funds provided in the first year of the second CA. Emma reminded us that funds in the second CA (the \$210,000), not spent or obligated by June 30, 2025 can be rolled over until the next year. That said, all funding awarded through the term of the second CA must be spent by April 30, 2029.

Heidi asked if we were sure to receive the entire \$210,000 awarded for the first year of the second CA. Emma assured us the funds were secure; funding for future years would be up to Congress. However, the Wild & Scenic Rivers program has strong support bi-partisan in Congress as many states have designated rivers.

### Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed a 1-page Summary of Council's finances through October 30, 2024:

- Total Contractual: Contractual funds disbursed in October included \$1,500 for the interpretive signs project and \$31,000 for Land Protection grants. With another \$77,056 committed to ongoing activities, there is a balance of \$22,479 to spend or obligate by April 30, 2025. Lucy added that there are a few older community grants that she and other town representatives are working to close.
- NRWA Program Support: Most of the \$2,788 spent on staff support included Wynne's time as Outreach Coordinator and staff support on the culvert assessment training project. Wynne noted that a second NRWA staff person is going through certification to lead volunteers in culvert assessments. There is \$28,511 in committed staff time for various projects, which is resulting in a \$14,532 deficit. However, the staff time estimated for these projects may not all be used and, if need be, we could request transfer of unspent Contractual Funds (up to 10%) to Staff Support in the current CA budget or draw on funds from the second CA for Staff Support.

### Update on Current Projects

*Jr Ranger River Book:* A small group comprised of Stacey Chilcoat, Diane Carson, Beth, Emma, Wynne, and Lucy has begun working on this project. Stacey explained that we are leaning towards a 15-20 page booklet with activities targeted for different age groups. While the booklet does have a standard NPS-template we can adapt and will be printed by the NPS, it is up to us to cover other costs, such as graphics design. Wynne had reached out to Geralyn Miller, the graphics designer used for the interpretive signage project, who has given a very preliminary estimate of \$1,026 for her services. Several suggestions were made for outreach on content such as contacting Pam Landry (Project WILD), DCR, and MassAudubon for similar activities. It was also suggested that we reach out to the Boy and Girl Scouts, and Sea Scouts for content ideas and distribution.

*Culvert Assessment & Mapping:* Wynne reported that approximately 30 people attended a recent introductory training program; half of the attendees were water quality monitors and the others town staff such as DPW, Conservation Commissioners or land agents. As there is no grant program in NH to fund assessing culverts, the initial focus of this project will be on 80 to 100 culverts in the Nissitissit sub-watershed with the goal of creating a prioritization list for the NH towns, similar to the metric used by MA DER. In addition, the NRWA is seeking to leverage this project to obtain DER grants to fund assessment of 500 – 700 culverts in the Fitchburg and Leominster area which are a high priority for assessment, especially after last spring's flooding in Leominster.

*Interpretive Signage:* Wynne reported that the order has been placed to produce the signs and she expects delivery in early January. Installation will be in the spring and at no cost to the Council.

### Potential Projects

*Nissitissit River Access:* Emma reported that this site in Hollis on lands owned by Beaver Brook Association (BBA) had been assessed at the September 2023 River Access Workshop and found in need of improvement to limit flow of sediment from the parking area and erosion of the bank. Last May a

geomorphological study was conducted and now a topographic study needs to be done to determine how best to correct these issues. Both the Nissitissit River Land Trust (NRLT) and BBA are interested in correcting this situation. However, this site is only used as a pullout and not put in, as the river downstream is not suitable for paddling. Lucy asked if this is a project the Council would be interested in working on with NRLT and BBA, should they want our assistance. After some discussion focused on public use of the site and the need to correct the run-off and bank erosion to limit sedimentation of the river, it was felt important to reach out to NRLT and BBA, as well as Hollis, to offer to help (mostly financially) should they want to pursue rectifying this problem.

*Regional Invasives Species Management:* Pat Huckery proposed the Council consider forming a regional working group to address invasives species management, noting it was one of the topics of concern at each of the three regional land conservation stewardship workshops last year. There are citizen groups in many of our towns seeking to address this problem, but may lack staff or funds to accomplish their objectives. They also might need assistance in seeking and administering grants. Pat suggested that the Council might be well suited to coordinate and oversee this work on a regional level. Heidi suggested we reach out to SuAsCo as they have similar programs ([www.cisma-suasco.org](http://www.cisma-suasco.org) and [www.snepnetwork.org/stormwaterretrofit](http://www.snepnetwork.org/stormwaterretrofit)). Bernadette McQuilkin asked if the NRWA tests for cyanobacteria as she has noticed significant water chestnut infestations in the Nashua River at the Petapawag access. As water chestnuts restrict water flow, the water temperatures can rise causing an outbreak of the cyanobacteria. Wynne reported that NRWA's water quality monitors do not test for cyanobacteria, but it may be worth considering. Bernadette added that as a member of the Hollis Conservation Commission, she had applied for and the Town of Hollis had received a fully-forgivable \$100,000 loan from the NH Clean Water State Revolving program to determine the causes of the severe cyanobacteria problem in Silver Lake. Funds are being used for a study by FB Environmental which is due to be completed by the end of the 2025. There are few other grants available and applying and administering them is a challenge for volunteers. She noted that management of invasives can take years and constant monitoring, again a challenge for volunteers. Sherry Anders added that it is also important to work with individual landowners abutting waterways, and not solely public and private conservation organizations. She encouraged us to pursue a regional approach as well as supporting individual towns' efforts. Beth suggested we invite a representative from SuAsCo to come to one of our meetings to share the effectiveness of their regional approach to this problem.

Lucy suggested we form a working group to look into this proposal and report back to the Council. Pat, Beth, Michele Girard, Sherry, and Wynne offered to do so. Wynne suggested we also ask another NRWA staff member, Marisa Browning-Kamins who has expertise in invasives management, to join this working group.

### Community Grants

*Harvard 2024 Bare Hill Pond:* On motion made, seconded and unanimously approved, the Final Report of the Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee for its 2024 grant was approved by the Council. Lucy will authorize payment of the remaining grant funds. Wynne noted that the press releases did not mention the W&S Stewardship Council's support of this project. While not unique to this grantee, it is an issue we need to address. Lucy added that there is the added confusion between the NRWA and the W&S Stewardship Council.

*Harvard 2024 Fivesparks:* A public reception is being held on Saturday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> from 3 – 6 PM at Fivesparks in Harvard for "Destination Nature," a juried art show supported by a grant to Fivesparks and the Harvard Conservation Trust. Lucy noted there is a section of the show dedicated to the W&S rivers and encouraged members to attend.

## Forest Legacy Project

Lucy announced that one property (of the 19 tracts in this project) has successfully been completed, enrolled in FLP, and the landowner paid.

## Updates and Announcements

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, December 19, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom